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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Monday, December 14, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CAUSTIC POISON ACT PROTECTS CHILDREN." Facts from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Homemakers, before I'm through with this report from Washington, I predict that some of you will be asking yourselves: "Did I put that can of lye where Johnny can't possibly reach it?"

And I won't be surprised if you leave me abruptly, before I'm through, to make sure that the can of lye, or the bottle of ammonia you used in cleaning, is stored in a safe place. For a can of poison within reach of a small child is as deadly a weapon as a loaded gun.

Today's report from the Federal Food and Drug Administration deals with the Caustic Poison Act, and with two little boys who are making a miraculous recovery from the effects of drinking lye.

One child lives in Chicago and the other in Washington, D. C. Both swallowed enough lye to burn the tissues of the throat and esophagus, and for a time it seemed certain that both children would starve to death, because their throats were gradually closing. They are now on the slow road to recovery. In order to gradually open the scarred throat tissues, one child swallows a string of tiny rubber balls every day, and the other swallows a string of small beads, each larger than the other. The doctors, by withdrawing the swallowed objects, are keeping the passages of the throat open, and gradually enlarging them as they heal.

As our official correspondent points out, the Caustic Poison Act, designed to prevent such tragedies, could not have prevented these two particular accidents, for they were due to carelessness. The youngster in Chicago swallowed lye about fourteen months ago, while playing in the home of his parents. He found a toy pail in which someone had mixed a solution of lye. Most of it had been used, but a little of the liquid was left in the pail, and the child, thirteen months old at the time, drank the poison. When he was taken to a hospital last July it was all but impossible for him to take even liquid food.

The Washington baby swallowed part of a can of lye last April. When he entered the hospital, he had wasted away from 35 to 15 pounds. His throat had gradually closed. The doctor performed an operation to permit a tiny opening. Every day the small patient swallows a string of 26 steel beads, of graduated sizes. The beads go through the child's mouth, throat, and esophagus into the stomach and out a rubber tube inserted in the wall of the abdomen. The opening in the throat has been made larger, and the boy now takes food. Barring complications, and avoiding haste, the doctors say he will recover after a few more months of treatment.

Quoting our correspondent directly: "The stories of the two injured children have been given considerable publicity, and have brought attention to the Caustic Poison Act, and what it can do to protect the public -- if the public will cooperate.

"Congress passed the Federal Caustic Poison Act about ten years ago, through the efforts of the American Medical Association and other interested persons and organizations. The Act applies to certain caustic or corrosive substances and preparations containing them. Its purpose is to see that these substances are properly labeled, so that the users may be on their guard. The Food and Drug Administration enforces the Act."

Now, what are the substances that must be labeled "Poison", under the law? Here's the list: Hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid, nitric acid, carbolic acid, oxalic acid, any salt of oxalic acid, acetic acid, hypochlorous acid or its salts (except chlorinated lime to yield available chlorine), potassium hydroxide, sodium hydroxide (caustic soda and lye), silver nitrate, and ammonia water. Any of these twelve substances, in percentages that make them poisonous, must be plainly and clearly labeled with four distinct markings.

Quoting directly from today's report: "First, the word 'POISON' must be printed on the label in capital letters. Second, directions for treatment of the poisonous substances must be stated on the label. The Food and Drug Administration has published treatments for each of the twelve caustic or corrosive substances covered by the Caustic Poison Act. They are intended primarily to relieve the patient until a doctor comes to give more thorough treatment, if necessary.

"Third, the label must give the common name of the poison. Fourth, the label must bear the name and place of business of the manufacturer, seller, or distributor.

"Officials of the Food and Drug Administration state that legal labeling will serve as a caution for parents in storing such poisonous substances out of reach of small children. But, while the Government is seeing to it that the poison labels are used, these labels alone will not prevent disaster. The poisons themselves must be kept away from children. A small child, as every mother knows, has little sense of taste and is likely to put anything into his mouth that he can get into his hands."

Well, I think we'll all agree that no truer words than those were ever written. Sometimes I wonder how children ever survive the hazards of babyhood, considering all the dangerous objects that are snatched from their hands, before they reach an age of discretion.

But let's finish today's report from the Federal Food and Drug Administration. "Just recently," states our correspondent, "ten druggists and paint dealers in the District of Columbia were fined for selling oxalic acid, acetic acid, and ammonia water without the required legal labeling. The law provides for a fine of not more than $200 or imprisonment for not more than 90 days, or both.

"On the whole," concludes our report, "there is a very general compliance with the Federal Caustic Poison Act. During the last fiscal year, the Food and Drug Administration found it necessary to institute criminal or seizure action in only 14 cases."

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